

AT&T, Others Stumble over Sept. 11 Tweets

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NEW YORK (AP) — AT&T and some other companies learned quickly on Wednesday, the 12th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, that it's sometimes best to stay out of the conversation. Even if everyone else is talking.

Twitter was aflutter with American flags, bald eagles and photos of the New York City skyline on Wednesday, and the hashtag "neverforget" was one of the top trends on the microblogging site all day.

But one post in particular, from AT&T Inc.'s official Twitter account, caught flak from bloggers and Twitter users. They criticized the company for seeming to use the tragedy to advertise phones to its 285,000 followers.

The photo, which was also posted on Instagram and Facebook, showed a hand holding a smartphone against the New York skyline, appearing to be taking a photo of the twin lights that illuminate the city's sky on the anniversary of the attacks each year.

After criticism that ranged from "tacky" to profanities, Dallas-based AT&T removed the photo and said: "We apologize to anyone who felt our post was in poor taste. The image was solely meant to pay respect to those affected by the 9/11 tragedy."

Another photo generating a quite a flurry of Web outrage on Wednesday shows a paper sign with Marriott hotel logo resting next to a photo of muffins of indeterminate — but possibly blueberry — persuasion.

The sign reads: "In remembrance of those we lost on 9/11 the hotel will provide complimentary coffee and mini muffins from 8:45 - 9:15 am."

Then, it was Marriott's turn to apologize.

"We are aware of the picture that was tweeted. It shows an offer that was made independently by the hotel and not the Marriott Hotels brand. As far as we know, it was limited to one property," the hotel chain said in a statement. "While the hotel was making a sympathetic gesture to its guests in remembrance of 9/11, we apologize and understand why some people may have misunderstood the intent of the offer. We are reminding our hotels to use discretion and be sensitive when remembering major events such as 9/11."

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On Sept. 11, even free muffins can be offensive. But Marriott spokesman John Wolf offered some context to the sign. It wasn't that the hotel decided to give out free pastries to commemorate the attacks. Rather, he said that the staff of this particular hotel — whose location he would not disclose — noticed last year that its guests started gathering in the lobby to watch the ceremony commemorating the attacks on television on the morning of Sept. 11. So, the hotel decided to put out free coffee and pastries to the guests.

A Marriott hotel was among the buildings that collapsed in New York City on Sept. 11, 2001 after hijackers flew jetliners into the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

Other tweets, from Burger King to Macy's and Walgreens, didn't generate much anger, showing that the ire of the Internet is often fickle. Walgreens posted a picture of an American flag, which may have been more difficult to construe as advertising than a phone from a phone company. Macy's received mostly positive responses for this tweet on its official Twitter feed:

"Hug your family. Reflect on the sunset. Look forward to the sunrise. Hold your head high. Imagine a better world. And #NeverForget 9/11/2001," the post read. Macy's spokeswoman Robin Reibel said the response was "overwhelmingly positive for the sentiment that we expressed."

"Our messaging around this day has always been very thoughtful and is heartfelt," Reibel said.

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